

VZCZCXR06416
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #3971/01 3411411
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071411Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4700
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003971

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/05/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL IR I2

SUBJECT: SOUTH'S GOVERNORS AND PCS: SHIFTING ALLEGIANCES,
PITCHED BATTLES

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Greg D'Elia for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a joint Baghdad POL - Southern PRT/REO/ePRT cable.

¶2. (C) Summary: The relationships between provincial governors and the Provincial Councils (PCs) shape the political landscape of southern Iraq. Those relations are marked by fluid political identities, uneven distributions of power, and) in at least two provinces (Babil and Basrah)) pitched battles between the governor and the Provincial Council. This cable provides brief descriptions and analysis of the relationships between the governors and PC in Iraq's nine southern governorates.

¶3. (C) Summary c'td: Politicians affiliated with the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq (ISCI) dominate elected offices in the south. Five southern governors belong to ISCI, two (nominally) are members of Da'wa and Fadhlah and the Sadr Trend each boast one governor. ISCI also holds majorities in the Babil, Diwaniyah, Karbala and Najaf PCs and holds a significant number of seats in Muthanna and Thi Qar. Party affiliations are fluid throughout the south and politicians often switch allegiances multiple times after assuming office. The actual power of the governors depends on their personal relationship to the PC and national leadership. Shared party affiliation is no guarantee of cooperation between a PC and governor. End Summary.

Babil: ISCI PC versus ISCI Governor

¶4. (C) In Babil the ISCI-dominated PC is actively trying to force the ISCI governor from office. Babil was scheduled to transition to provincial Iraqi control (PIC) in December 2007, but PRT and MNF point to PIC in February 2008 at the earliest. Governor Salem Saleh Mahdi al-Muslimawi (ISCI) is a political protege of Abdel Aziz al-Hakim. Mohammed Ali Hussein al-Masoudi (ISCI) chairs the PC and the ISCI-linked Faithful Iraqis Association controls 25 seats. (Note: Each Provincial Council is composed of 41 members including the governor and deputy governor. End note)

¶5. (C) Muslimawi has survived repeated challenges from the PC encouraged by Sayyid Rasul, a longtime rival and political independent. A recent effort to oust the governor for falsifying his educational history gained the backing of several ISCI members. The most serious challenge to date to Muslimawi's authority, Muslimawi reacted by mustering support of national leaders and delivering populist speeches against Coalition Forces (CF). The PC failed to achieve quorum on the day of the vote for Muslimawi's ouster after intimidation of members by armed men linked to the Badr Corps. Even with quorum, subsequent PC sessions have not moved for a vote. On November 23 fifteen PC members, representing Sayyid Rasul, ISCI, Dawa, and the Communist Party held a joint press conference and signed a petition demanding the Governor's

removal and prosecution. To date, Muslimawi retains his grip on office. Public clamoring for his ouster notwithstanding, no further action, pending a PC vote, is likely.

Basrah: Fadhilah Governor a political survivor

¶6. (C) Basrah remains Fadhilah's sole political stronghold. The party retains control of the governorship and PC despite repeated challenges from other quarters. Mohammed Wa'eli (Fadhilah) holds the governorship. Fadilah also holds 12 seats on the PC, which is chaired by Mohammed Obadi (Da'wa). The Islamic Basrah party has the largest presence with 20 seats.

¶7. (C) Wa'eli has survived numerous attempts to oust him from office. The most recent came in a PC vote of no-confidence in May 2007 following allegations of corruption and power-hoarding. The PC challenge to Wa'eli reportedly enjoyed support from outside forces, notably PM Maliki. Wa'eli fought back, mounting a successful defense on the parliamentary grounds that two-thirds of the total PC membership were not actually present at the vote, as required. On November 22 the Iraqi Supreme Court ruled in Wa'eli's favor, confirming the September 30 verdict of the Basrah Administrative Court and effectively ending the case. Since the September 30 verdict Wa'eli has met with Badr officials and reached out to PM Maliki thanks to U.S. encouragement. The governor and PC have settled back into a working relationship, based partly on mutual suspicion of PM Maliki's central government and partly on an understanding that the the governor will allow the PC greater control over the budget.

BAGHDAD 00003971 002 OF 003

Diwaniyah: ISCI Governor and PC

¶8. (C) Governor Hamid al-Khaduri (ISCI), a long-time Badr member, was elected into office following the August 2007 assassination of Governor Khaleel Jamil Hamza. The PC is led by Sheikh Hussein al Kailidi and is dominated by ISCI (20 seats of 41 total).

Karbala: Strong Da'wa Governor

¶9. (C) Governor Aqeel (Da'wa) is a strong politician facing no serious political threats to his office. Karbala's PC is dominated by ISCI (21), followed by Fadhilah (5), and headed by Abd Al'al Mohammed al-Yasiry (Iraqi Democratic Current), a political independent currently finishing his law degree. Karbala transitioned to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in October 2007.

Maysan: The south's only Sadrists Governor

¶10. (C) Maysan Governor Adil Mohoder Rahdi al-Maliki is a former JAM fighter closely aligned to Muqtada al-Sadr. He belongs to the Hussein Ideology Front (HIF), a local party platform of the Office of Muqtada al-Sadr (OMS). Maysan's PC is the most diverse in the south, with 11 different parties holding seats. The HIF controls the largest portion on the PC with 10 seats. The PC has periodically announced "disengagements" from CF to protest raids and arrest operations. The Maysan Governor enjoys close ties to Iraq's national leadership as well as other political parties. He also has a close working relationship with the PC. Despite his strong political base he is reportedly intimidated by more militant JAM/OMS members, especially local JAM leader Sayyid Amar al-Battat.

Muthanna: New Governor not up to task

¶11. (C) Governor Muthanna Ali al-Hassani, a longtime Badr officer and ISCI member, was assassinated on August 20. Local officials believe that Sadrists, with Iranian backing, exploited tensions within Hassani's tribe to carry out the assassination. Following the assassination, political maneuvering between ISCI and the Albu Hassan faction led to the appointment of Ahmed Marzook al-Salal as governor and Abdul Hussein al-Dhalami (ISCI) as PC chair. Salal began his political career with the INC, later switched to Da'wa, and now leans to ISCI. He lacks the political clout of his predecessor. The three most powerful parties in Muthanna's diverse PC are Fadhilah (6 seats), ISCI (8 seats) and al-Furat al-Aswat (6 seats).

Najaf: ISCI Governor and PC

¶12. (C) Najaf Governor Asad Sultan Abu Jilal al-Ta'ie (ISCI) lived in Finland during the 1990s and returned to Iraq as an advisor to Ayatollah Hakim. He works closely with Deputy Governor Abdul Hussein Baqir Abtan (Badr) although there is some tension between the two politicians. There is friction between their respective staffs and both camps compete for media attention. The DG recently took on an enlarged role on reconstruction and investment issues. PC Chair Abdul Hussein Musa Aboud al-Mosawi (independent) does not enjoy close relationships with any of Najaf's leaders and is routinely ignored by the provincial government. ISCI holds 17 seats on the PC, guaranteeing that the council as a whole supports the governor and his administration.

Thi Qar: ISCI Governor clashing with diverse PC

¶13. (C) Governor Aziz Alwan al-Ghili (ISCI) resided in Iran for 17 years. A general in the Badr Brigade, al-Ghili was wounded in a gas attack while fighting alongside the peshmerga against Saddam. Hassan Talif al-Tali, a former Arabic teacher from Nasiriyah, heads the Thi Qar PC. Originally a member of Fadilah, he secretly switched his allegiance to the small Islamic Democratic Party. Seats in the PC are divided between Fadhilah (11), Da'wa (10), and ISCI (10), with the remainder distributed among various smaller parties. There is an ongoing clash between the governor and PC over the distribution of powers, particularly on the budget and development projects. Despite this tension they have effectively controlled the governorate by finding accommodation with the many parties in government as well as the local tribes.

Wassit: Da'wa Governor, independent PC, both incompetent

BAGHDAD 00003971 003 OF 003

¶16. (C) Governor Abd al Latif Hamad Turfa is a self-proclaimed political independent with close ties to Da'wa and Iran. Latif lacks interest in politics, governance, provision of services, or budget issues. It is widely believed that he heavily relies on his well-spoken and intelligent Deputy Governor, Ahmed Abd al Raseed, for expertise in governing the province. The governor's office has monopolized local political and technical talent, office, forcing the PC to accede to Turfa's budget prioritization to ensure projects are properly planned and executed.

¶17. (C) The Wassit PC is dominated by the Iraqi Elites Gathering with 31 seats. Most members now identify themselves as &independent.⁸ The current PC chair, Mohamed Hassan Jaber, is a former professor of psychology at Wassit University and one of the few competent PC members. The public sees the council as corrupt, uncaring, and under the control of Iran. Many PC members have family and property in Iran. The local Da'wa leader, for example, reportedly has only Iranian citizenship.

BUTENIS